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## ABSTRACT

This study examined how beginning Japanese as a Foreign Language (JFL) learners developed their understanding of the various functions of the "masu" form (for polite and formal situations) and plain form (for intimate and informal situations), noting how they used them in an appropriate manner. Participants included three undergraduate students of Japanese heritage enrolled in JFL courses. Data were collected as part of a larger study that examined the effects of an instructional approach to teaching cultural aspects of language over three semesters. The approach included explicit instruction in the various functions of the masu and plain forms. Researchers analyzed students' open-ended weekly journals in which they recorded what they had recognized about the way Japanese people interacted and how the interactions differed from their expectations. Ethnographic observation tasks were assigned toward the end of the semester. These tasks required students to go outside of the classroom and observe Japanese people interacting. Students' use of the two forms was analyzed by examining videotaped midterm and final oral tasks, which placed them in various situations. Results showed a gradual development of the ability to notice the pragmatic functions of two forms and to use them appropriately in oral tasks. (Contains 19 references.) (SM)

## Learning the Pragmatic Functions of the Japanese *Masu* and Plain Forms

### Introduction

When one engages in interaction in Japanese, he or she is required to make a choice between two forms, namely the *masu* form and the plain form, in the clause-final position. In general, it is understood that the *masu* form is used in polite and formal situations, whereas the plain form is used in intimate and informal situations. This understanding is reflected in many of the commonly used textbooks for teaching Japanese as a second/foreign language. For instance, Situational Functional Japanese (Tsukuba Language Group 1995) introduces the two forms as, "the plain form is used in casual style sentences, while the polite form is used in formal style sentences" (p.48), and explains that "the casual style is used between people who are close, such as family members or good friends" (p.52), and "the formal style is used between speakers whose relationship is rather distant and formal, such as between strangers or between a student and a teacher" (p.52).<sup>1</sup>

While such descriptions are certainly the main functions of the two forms, they imply that the *masu* and plain forms index formality or informality determined by social status, and the use of one form remains fixed in a particular relationship. In other words, it could be said that emphasis is placed on the rather static sociolinguistic functions of the two forms. However, studies such as Ikuta (1983) and Cook (1996a: 1996b), which have looked at natural occurring utterances in various situations, have revealed how people alternately use the two forms to pragmatically signal attitudinal as well as social distance or to index various social meanings. Such findings then suggest that instructing these forms as simply index markers of formality/informality or that certain social relationships determine the use of one form over the other would not be sufficient in enabling learners of Japanese to understand how these forms are actually used and also enabling them to participate in interaction by efficiently differentiating the two forms. In order to understand the pragmatic functions of the *masu* and plain forms in alternate use, it becomes "necessary to examine not only the linguistic forms in question but also the co-occurring contextual features that surround them" (Cook 1999: 88).<sup>2</sup>

While it is crucial to explore effective approaches to instructing the pragmatic functions of the two forms, it is also important to understand the processes of interlanguage pragmatic development. Therefore, in this study, I examine how beginning JFL (Japanese as a Foreign Language) learners develop their understanding of the various functions of the *masu* and plain forms and also use them in a manner appropriate to the context, in the hope of presenting suggestions for the instruction of the two forms.

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## Alternate use of the *masu* and plain forms

Various studies which examined the alternate use of the *masu* and plain forms in natural occurring utterances have shown that the *masu* and plain forms are not simply markers of politeness/formality and nonpoliteness/informality. Maynard (1991: 1993), who studied both intimate spoken conversation and written prose, proposes that people use the *masu* form when their awareness of the addressee is high, whereas they use the plain form when such awareness is low, for instance, when the speaker remembers abruptly, expresses sudden emotion or expresses internal thoughts. Ikuta (1983) analyzed a Japanese television interview program and claims that the use or non-use of the *masu* form signals the degree of "distance" in interpersonal relationships rather than simple "politeness" or "formalness." In her data, Ikuta shows how the interviewer switches between the two forms while the social factors, such as gender, age, social status of the participants, their relationship, place, time and purpose of talk, and the subject matter, remain unchanged. Ikuta claims that while the above mentioned social factors in the particular instance she examined constrains the interviewer to maintain distance by using the *masu* form, the interviewer's empathy functions as a strategic factor which allows her to switch to the plain form and reduce the distance with the interviewee, thus allowing her to maintain smooth flow of conversation.

While acknowledging Ikuta's (1983) proposal that the *masu* form indexes interpersonal distance as insightful, Cook (1999) points out that it cannot account for situations where parents use this form when teaching their children social norms. In Cook (1996a), she proposes that the *masu* form also indexes intrapersonal distance, and describes that when a mother teaches social norms to her children, she is indicating her social role as a "mother" by distancing her innate self from her role as teacher of social rules of behavior. Based on analyses of parent-child interaction at homes and teacher-student interaction in elementary school classrooms, Cook (1996b), using Rosenberger's (1989) concept of modes of self in Japanese, claims that the *masu* form indexes the "disciplined" mode of self which is a cultivated mode for public presentation, and the plain form the "spontaneous" self which is the innate mode not wearing a social mask. Furthermore, Cook (1996b) claims that the two modes of self constitute contexts of *uchi* 'inside' and *soto* 'outside,' which are "a major organizational focus for Japanese self, social life and language" (Bachnik 1994: 3) and explains that one's mode of self is spontaneous in the *uchi* context, whereas it is disciplined in the *soto* context.

Due to the rich functions of the *masu* and plain forms as described above, it is unlikely that beginning learners of Japanese will understand these functions, notice them used in interaction and effectively use them themselves in a short period of time. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the processes of the learners' interlanguage development over time and also illustrate the problems which they face. As Kasper and Schmidt (1996) point out, in order to deepen our understanding of interlanguage pragmatic development, it is important to analyze the mechanisms which drive such development from one stage to another. Therefore, in this paper, I examine the processes of how three college-level beginning learners of Japanese develop their ability to notice the various functions of the *masu* and plain forms and use them appropriately according to the co-occurring contextual features over three semesters. The research questions to be pursued are 1) how can beginning JFL learners be observed to notice the various functions of the *masu* and plain forms?, and 2) how can the learners be observed to control the use of the

*masu* and plain forms appropriately according to the co-occurring contextual features?

## **Methodology**

The data analyzed in this paper is part of a data set collected for a larger study which examined the effects of an instructional approach to teaching cultural aspects of language over three semesters. The approach was informed by Agar's (1994) concept of "languaculture" and Mezirow's (1991) "theory of transformative learning" and aimed at developing the learners' ability to use Japanese with an understanding of its cultural aspects. (See Ishida (2001) for details of the approach.)

As Schmidt (1993) claims, one needs to notice pragmatic information in order to convert available input into intake. Furthermore, reviewing studies such as House (1996) and Tateyama et al. (1997) which have compared explicit and implicit approaches to pragmatic instruction, Kasper (1997) summarizes that explicit instruction which involved "description, explanation, and discussion of the pragmatic feature in addition to input and practice" were more effective in improving the learners' pragmatic abilities. Thus, in relation to the two forms which are the focus of this paper, the instructional approach included explicit instruction of the various functions of the *masu* and plain forms.

Due to the limited vocabulary and sentence structures which the learners are instructed at the beginners' level, emphasis was placed on the sociolinguistic functions, that is the two forms being markers of formality/informality, during the first semester, and pragmatic functions, such as the two forms being strategically alternated in an interaction with a single interlocutor, were gradually introduced from the second semester.

**Research Site** The study took place at a college located on the Pacific Rim. Foreign language courses are part of the basic requirements for undergraduate students and Japanese is one of the various languages that are offered. The data were collected over three semesters from courses, JPN101, 102 and 201, which are the two semesters of the first year and the first semester of the second year level. Class sessions are 50 minutes long and were held five times a week for the first semester and four times a week for the other two semesters due to changes in the curriculum. All three courses were taught by the researcher. The textbook used for the course is Situational Functional Japanese (Tsukuba Language Group 1995) and five to six lessons, which are organized around a specific situation, were covered each semester.

**Learners** The three learners, Jane, Kate and Sandy, whose data are analyzed in this paper are those who were in all three courses described above.<sup>3</sup> All three were female learners in their late teens and were of Japanese heritage. As shown in Table 1, their background of learning Japanese prior to taking JPN101, reason for taking Japanese and plans to use Japanese in the future varied.

Table 1  
Background Information of the Three Learners

|                            | Jane                                                                                             | Kate                                                                                                                          | Sandy                                                                                                                                |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ethnicity                  | Japanese, Okinawan                                                                               | Okinawan, Hawaiian, Japanese, Spanish, American Indian, Portuguese                                                            | Japanese-American                                                                                                                    |
| Previous Japanese          | 2 years in high school                                                                           | None                                                                                                                          | 9 years up until middle school                                                                                                       |
| Reason for taking Japanese | I thought that by taking Japanese I would get to learn more about my culture                     | I enjoy the Japanese language & culture mainly because I am Japanese. I want to learn more about Japanese culture & language. | I would like to become more comfortable and familiar with the Japanese language so I can at least understand and hopefully speak it. |
| Plans to use Japanese      | I like to be able to understand what my grandmother says about me when she talks to her friends. | I will use my Japanese knowledge for self-interest, to know & to share.                                                       | not right now.                                                                                                                       |

*Note:* The information presented in this table is based on the learners' self-report during the third semester.

**Data Collection** In order to analyze the learners' noticing of the various functions of the *masu* and plain forms, open-ended weekly journals and ethnographic observation tasks were analyzed. In the journals, the learners were guided to record, in English, what they had recognized about the ways in which Japanese people interact, and how similar or different the interactions are from their expectations. Ethnographic observation tasks were assigned towards the end of each semester. The task required the learners to go outside the classroom and observe situations in which Japanese people interact. The learners submitted a written report of their interpretations based on analysis of the contextual features which could influence the interactions they observed.

The learners' use of the two forms was analyzed by examining video-taped midterm and final oral tasks. The tasks were designed to place the learners in various situations based on what the learners had practiced in the lessons covered and were carried out in all three courses. Examples of the tasks include, 'dining at a restaurant with classmates,' 'calling the department store inquiring about a lost item,' and 'engaging in a small talk with the instructor.' Reflection sheets which the learners filled out after their task performances and also recorded feedback sessions which were arranged a few days after the task were also analyzed.

## Findings

Analysis of the data showed a gradual development in terms of what the learners were able to notice about the functions of the *masu* and plain forms as well as how they used the two

forms in the oral tasks. This section will show the development of the learners' noticing and use of the two forms over the three semesters.

### Aspects which the learners noticed

<JPN101> During the first semester, the learners started to show awareness of the sociolinguistic functions of the *masu* and plain forms. That is, for instance, they became aware of how the *masu* form is used when interacting with an instructor, and the plain form with a close person. A comment which Kate made in her fifth week journal entry is an example of how she became aware of the ways in which a student interacts with her instructor in Japanese after a class-discussion.

One thing that I found out during our lesson on Friday was that a student should always address their teacher in the formal style even though the teacher uses the casual style.<sup>4</sup> In learning this after the fact, I would like to apologize for not using the formal style when greeting you that Friday morning. You said おはよう [*ohayoo*] and I responded おはよう [*ohayoo*] instead of おはようございます. [*ohayoo gozaimasu*]. No wonder you had a shocked look on your face, I just didn't realize that I was incorrect until after the fact. I'll be sure not to make the same mistake twice!

Furthermore, the comments which the learners made in the oral task reflection sheets indicate that they were aware of the different forms depending on the relationships they were in. For instance, all three commented that they tried to use the *masu* form when interacting with an instructor and the plain form when interacting with a close friend.

However, the learners expressed difficulty focusing on catching the two forms when observing interactions in Japanese. In other words, they had not developed the ability to notice the two forms on-line. For instance, for her JPN101 ethnographic observation task, Sandy observed a Japanese television program and commented:

Although it had subtitles, it did not help me figure out in what form the father and daughter were talking to each other in. I had to listen to the language and the way they spoke.

Although Sandy had learned Japanese for nine years up until middle school, her difficulty focusing on the forms could be because of not learning Japanese during high school, or because it is likely that she was not taught to focus on different forms and their functions when she was learning Japanese before. A similar comment on having difficulties catching the forms was made by Kate, who had no prior experience learning Japanese, in her observation task as well. These comments suggest that while the learners were aware of the sociolinguistic functions of the two forms, they had difficulty focusing on them on-line when listening to native speakers of Japanese interacting at natural speed.

<JPN102> During the second semester, the learners started to catch the use of the two forms used in interactions in Japanese and notice their sociolinguistic functions. Kate, for her observation task, observed Japanese tourists in an elevator at a shopping center and wrote:

I understood the Japanese natives. I knew by the way of their speaking that they were close, either by friendship or by family. I could tell this because there was no use of the -desu or -masu form. Each of the Japanese natives spoke such that when they asked questions, they spoke to each other casually, instead of ending with -desuka or -masuka, they just used a rising intonation.

Jane also writes in her report on the observation task about what she noticed about the use of the two forms by the Japanese customers at the store she works at. She writes that the younger Japanese customers use the *masu* form while the older people tend to use the plain form. She analyzes that the older people use the plain form to be more casual with her because of the larger age difference.

These comments indicate that the learners in this study were able to catch some of the interactions in Japanese and notice the sociolinguistic functions of the *masu* and plain forms at this level. However, while some of the pragmatic functions had been introduced at this level, no observations of the pragmatic functions of the two forms were made.

<JPN201> During the third semester, the learners not only continued to notice the sociolinguistic functions of the two forms but also some pragmatic functions, that is, how the two forms were used alternately between the same interlocutors. Sandy watched a Japanese drama and reported in her observation assignment how the family members in that drama differentiated the two forms strategically. She writes:

The first thing that I realized was that the form and style of speech when used amongst the family members. It is really casual and plain, yet there are mixtures of formality when something is trying to be stressed. ... It may be a very casual and close relationship however, no matter how close you are to someone when you ask a favor, suggestion, and/or want to emphasize something you usually will use a little more formality.

Similarly, Jane notices how her Japanese boss at her work place uses the *masu* form in a strategic manner. In her observation assignment she writes:

Usually when I talk to my boss I speak in casual English and he speaks in plain Japanese. But I realized that when he asks me for favors then he switches to the formal form. For example, when he wants me to walk somewhere and buy him food.

In sum, the developmental stages of the learners' ability to notice the functions of the *masu* and plain forms could be summarized as in Figure 1.

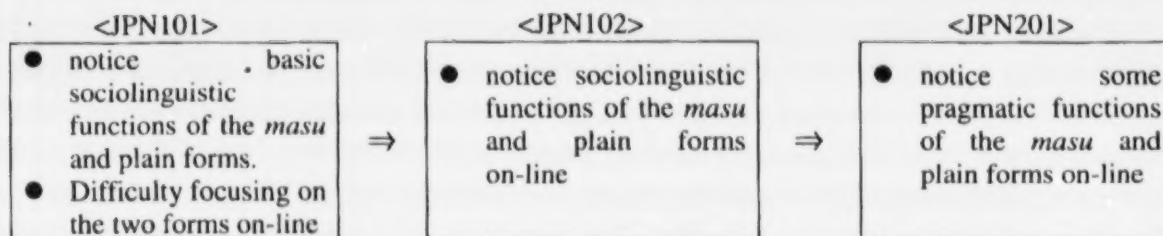


Figure 1. The developmental stages of the learners' ability to notice the functions of the *masu* and plain forms

### Learners' use of the *masu* and plain forms

In order to analyze how the learners developed their ability to control the use of the *masu* and plain forms according to the context, midterm and final oral tasks were transcribed and instances of appropriate and inappropriate use of the two forms in both *masu* expected and plain expected contexts were counted. Furthermore, the two forms were coded according to clause types, that is, nominal, verbal or adjectival clauses, that they belonged to in order to see whether developmental patterns were to be found in terms of grammatical categories. (The clause types which were coded in this study are shown in Appendix A.)

<JPN101> Table 2 shows the frequency of the appropriate and inappropriate use of the *masu* and plain forms in the midterm and final oral tasks during the first semester.

Table 2

Frequency of the Appropriate and Inappropriate Use of the *Masu* and Plain Forms in the JPN101 Midterm and Final Oral Tasks

|       | <i>masu</i> expected contexts |               |             |               | plain expected contexts |               |             |               |
|-------|-------------------------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|
|       | midterm                       |               | final       |               | midterm                 |               | final       |               |
|       | appropriate                   | inappropriate | appropriate | inappropriate | appropriate             | inappropriate | appropriate | inappropriate |
| Jane  | 10                            | 0             | 30          | 0             | 1                       | 1             | 11          | 2             |
| Kate  | 10                            | 0             | 16          | 0             | 3                       | 2             | 5           | 3             |
| Sandy | 0                             | 0             | 20          | 0             | 9                       | 4             | 6           | 2             |

As Table 2 shows, there were no instances in which the learners inappropriately used the plain form in the *masu* expected contexts. In other words, all three learners were consistent in their use of the *masu* forms in *masu* expected contexts. However, inappropriate use of the *masu* forms in plain expected contexts were found. Among the inappropriate use of the *masu* forms, 71% were in nominal clauses such as "*kyooiku desu*" ((My hobby) is education?) or "*aa soo desu ka*" (Is that so.), and 29% in verbal clauses such as "*arubaito shimasu*" (I work part time) in plain expected contexts. Excerpt 1 is an example of how *masu* forms were used in plain expected contexts.

<Excerpt 1: [midterm oral task] running into a classmate>

- 1 Kate: konnichiwa  
"Hello."  
2 Sandy: genki? [plain]  
"Are you genki?"  
3 Kate: hai genki [plain]  
"Yes, I'm genki."  
4 a senmon wa?  
"What's your major?"  
→ 5 Sandy: kyooiku desu [masu]  
"It is education."  
6 Kate-san wa?  
"How about you, Kate-san?"  
→ 7 Kate: serapii desu [masu]  
"It's therapy."  
8 Sandy: a soo [plain]  
"Is that so."

In this excerpt, Kate and Sandy see themselves as close friends who use the plain form. However, while lines 1, 2 and 8 show the two using the plain forms, they switch to the *masu* form in lines 5 and 7.

From the results described above, it could be said that the learners at the 101 level were rather fixed on using the *masu* form and were overusing them in the plain expected contexts. Since they commented in the reflection sheets that they tried to use the plain form in the plain expected contexts, it is not their unawareness but an issue of control of the two forms that result in the inconsistent mix. Such finding is consistent with Bialystok's (1993) claim that a task for adults learning a foreign language is to achieve higher levels of control in order to process relevant information smoothly in contexts and making appropriate selections of linguistic forms.

One possible reason which may account for the overuse of the *masu* form is the larger emphasis on the *masu* form in the textbook. While I had introduced some plain forms from the second lesson, it is not until lesson 5 that the plain form of the verbs is officially introduced in the textbook.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the situations which are the topic of each lesson are mostly ones which include *masu* expected contexts, allowing fewer opportunities for the learners to be exposed to plain expected contexts.

<JPN102> Table 3 shows the frequency of the appropriate and inappropriate use of the *masu* and plain forms in the midterm and final oral tasks in JPN102.

Table 3

Frequency of the Appropriate and Inappropriate Use of the *Masu* and Plain Forms in the JPN102 Midterm and Final Oral Tasks

|       | <i>masu</i> expected contexts |               |             |               | plain expected contexts |               |             |               |
|-------|-------------------------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|
|       | midterm                       |               | final       |               | midterm                 |               | final       |               |
|       | appropriate                   | inappropriate | appropriate | inappropriate | appropriate             | inappropriate | appropriate | inappropriate |
| Jane  | 9                             | 0             | 17          | 1             | 6                       | 1             | 6           | 0             |
| Kate  | 11                            | 1             | 31          | 8             | 8                       | 2             | 14          | 1             |
| Sandy | 13                            | 1             | 5           | 3             | 7                       | 0             | 12          | 0             |

At the 102 level, the learners occasionally used the plain forms in the *masu* expected contexts which was not observed during the first semester. While some inappropriate use of the plain forms in adjectival and verbal clauses were observed, more than half, that is 64%, of the inappropriate use were in nominal clauses. Excerpt 2 is an example where Kate uses the plain form in a *masu* expected context.

<Excerpt 2: [final oral task] talking with the instructor about his trip to Kenya>

- 1 Instructor: un kenia ni itta no wa nec itsu ka naa  
"yeah, when was it that I went to Kenya?"
- 2 roku roku nen mae roku nen mae desu kara kyuujuu yo nen  
"six six years ago six years ago so 94."
- 3 Kate: aa soo desu ka [masu]  
"Is that so."
- 4 Instructor: hai  
"Yes."
- 5 Kate: nan desu ka? [masu] umm  
"What is it? umm"
- 6 dooshite [plain]  
"Why?"
- 7 Instructor: aa dooshite  
"Uh (you're asking) why"
- 8 Kate: dooshite [plain]  
"Why?"

In her reflection sheet, Kate says she tried to use the *masu* form to be polite to the instructor and she actually uses the *masu* form in lines 3 and 5. However, when asking the question "why?" she does not attach *desu ka* and leaves it in the plain form (line 6). Kate asks a question in line 5 but realizes that it is not the word she wanted to use and corrects herself in line 6. However, while she added *desu ka* when using *nan* ("what") in line 5, she utters her intended question *dooshite* ("why?") without *desu ka* in line 6. One reason why she failed to utter *dooshite* in the *masu* form could be because she was focusing more on recalling the right vocabulary, and paying

less attention to the form. While I repeat her question in line 7 to think to myself of the reason why I went to Kenya, it appears that Kate takes that utterance as a confirmation of her question and repeats *dooshite* in line 8, this time sounding more confident. Her lack of *desu ka* in line 8 could be because she was still concerned with the right vocabulary and uttered line 8 assuring that *dooshite* was the word she had been looking for.

In another place in the same task, Kate fails to attach *desu* when talking about the frequency she works. In response to the instructor's question asking how many times she works per week, she pauses and replies *san mai* ("three sheets") using the wrong counter to mark frequency and without a *desu* which would have made the clause into the *masu* form. After I follow her saying *san kai* ("three times") with the correct counter, she utters *san kai*, but still without the *desu*. These instances suggest that Kate is cognitively burdened with remembering the correct linguistic items and not being able to pay attention to the forms.

However, a pattern which was observed at this level is the learners' self-correction of inappropriate forms in verbal clauses. That is, instances of the learners self-correcting their inappropriate use of plain forms in verbal clauses in *masu* expected contexts were observed. Excerpt 3 is an example of such case by Kate.

<Excerpt 3: [final oral task] talking about winter break with the instructor>

- |     |             |                                                                                                                         |
|-----|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | Instructor: | Kate-san wa fuyu yasumi doko ka e <u>ikimasu</u> ka? [masu]<br>"Kate-san are you going somewhere for the winter break?" |
| → 2 | Kate:       | aa watashi wa uchi e <u>iku</u> [plain] <u>ikimasu</u> [masu]<br>"Uh I'm going to my home"                              |

Instances of self-correction in verbal clauses was also observed in Sandy's production and these could be signs of the process which the learners are trying to control the use of the two forms according to the contexts. While instances of self-correction were not observed in the plain expected contexts, the overall decrease of the inappropriate *masu* forms seen in Table 3 could be a result of the learners being able to control the two forms.

During this semester, there was a context in which all three learners were able to pragmatically differentiate the two forms according to the on-going contextual features when talking to a single interlocutor. In the midterm oral task, part of the task was to call a classmate at their home and tell them about their sickness. Below is an excerpt performed by Sandy.

<Excerpt 4: [midterm oral task] calling a classmate at home>

- |   |        |                                                                     |
|---|--------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | J:     | Moshi moshi<br>"Hello."                                             |
| 2 | Sandy: | Moshi moshi Sandy <u>desu</u> [masu] kedo<br>"Hello this is Sandy." |
| 3 |        | J-san <u>imasu</u> ka?[masu]<br>"Is J there?"                       |
| 4 | J:     | Hai watashi dakedo                                                  |

- 5 Sandy: "Yes, this is she."  
A konnichiwa  
"Oh hello."  
→ 6 ano ashita no kurasu no koto nan da [plain] kedo  
"Uhm it's about tomorrow's class."

In this excerpt, Sandy starts out her telephone conversation in the *masu* form (lines 2 and 3) since she does not know who is answering the phone. However, when she learns that it is her classmate J who is on the phone, she switches to the plain form as seen in line 6. This example shows, how Sandy, while talking to the same interlocutor, attends to the on-going contextual feature, that is learning who is on the other side of the phone, and switches to the plain form accordingly. A similar switch of the forms was observed by Jane and Kate as well in the same task.

<JPN201> Table 4 shows the frequency of the appropriate and inappropriate use of the *masu* and plain forms in the midterm and final oral tasks in JPN201.

Table 4

Frequency of the Appropriate and Inappropriate Use of the *Masu* and Plain Forms in the JPN201 Midterm and Final Oral Tasks

|       | <i>masu</i> expected contexts |               |             |               | plain expected contexts |               |             |               |
|-------|-------------------------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|
|       | midterm                       |               | final       |               | midterm                 |               | final       |               |
|       | Appropriate                   | inappropriate | appropriate | inappropriate | appropriate             | inappropriate | appropriate | inappropriate |
| Jane  | 22                            | 1             | 22          | 3             | 4                       | 1             | 21          | 0             |
| Kate  | 37                            | 1             | 61          | 2             | 1                       | 0             | 0           | 0             |
| Sandy | 21                            | 5             | 19          | 2             | 2                       | 3             | 16          | 4             |

Among the inappropriate uses of the plain form in *masu* expected contexts, 54% were in nominal clauses, 38% in adjectival clauses and 8% in verbal clauses. What appears notable at this level are instances of self-correction in nominal clauses which were not observed in the previous semesters. For example, excerpt 5 shows how Kate self-corrects her plain form in a situation conversing with the instructor.

<Excerpt 5: [final oral task] talking about student's plan for the summer>

- 1 Instructor: aa natsu yasumi natsu yasumi wa ne  
"Uh summer break, as for summer break,"  
2 boku wa ano kariforunia ni ikimasu [masu]  
"I'm going to California."  
3 Kate: aa soo desu ka [masu]  
"Is that so."

- 4 dooshite? [plain]  
 "Why?"
- 5 Instructor: a kariforunia wa ano  
 "Uh as for California uhm,"
- 6 Kate: dooshite desu ka [masu] sumimasen  
 "Why? I'm sorry."

Similar to her utterance in excerpt 2, she first uses *dooshite* ("why") without the *desu ka* in line 4. However, she realizes that she needs to add *desu ka* and rephrases her question in line 6 followed by an apology for not adding it right before. This can be contrasted to her performance in excerpt 2 in which she did not show any indication of noticing that the *dooshite* was inappropriately used in that context. Additionally, when the topic of conversation was about Kate's work again in the final task, she first said *yon kai* ("four times [plain]") but corrects herself by saying *yon kai desu* ("four times [masu]"). These examples show that Kate still mixes the two forms in *masu* expected contexts but is in a stage where she can catch herself and make corrections on her own.

While there were instances where Jane and Sandy also inappropriately used the plain forms in nominal clauses, only Jane catches herself and corrects her utterance. This indicates that Sandy is not at the stage where she can catch herself and make corrections like Kate and Jane.

As for the use of the two forms in plain expected contexts, as it can be seen in Table 4, there was only one instance of an inappropriate use of the *masu* form in Jane's performance, which was actually self-corrected, and Kate was hardly in any contexts to use the plain form.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, Sandy showed inconsistent use of the two forms in plain expected contexts in both midterm and final oral tasks. Close analysis of the two tasks reveal different possible reasons for her inconsistent use of the two forms in the two tasks.

For the midterm task, part of the task was to give directions to a close friend. While situations to be performed with close friends were arranged with classmates most of the times, the 201 midterm task was arranged with the instructor because of time constraints. Therefore, Sandy's use of the *masu* form in this task could be due to the fact of having to perform a situation with a close friend with an instructor. Actually, she did comment in the feedback session that her switching to the *masu* form in that task could be because she was used to using the *masu* form with me. Therefore, while Sandy was not able to attend to the close friend factor in the task, it could be said that she unconsciously attended to the real situation, that is performing a task with an instructor and used the *masu* form in some places.

As for the final oral task, in a situation talking with a classmate, Sandy's partner, an actual classmate, chose to use the *masu* form with Sandy because she says she has difficulty with the plain form and never feels comfortable using it with anyone. Sandy in response to her partner using the *masu* form comments in the reflection sheet saying:

I started talking in the plain form with K [name of the partner] since she is my classmate and because we are around the same age. However, she spoke in the *masu* form and thus I didn't know if I should switch too. I thought by using mainly plain form, I wasn't distancing us but because I was using the plain and my partner used the *masu* form I

thought maybe it would appear that I was talking down to her.

In this task, although Sandy's use of the *masu* form were counted as inappropriate, it could be said that she was accommodating to the contextual feature, that is her partner unexpectedly using the *masu* form. Therefore, in both the midterm and final oral tasks, while Table 4 shows that Sandy is inconsistent in her use of the two forms in plain expected contexts, analysis of the data reveals that she is attending to the contextual features of the situations she is in.

A context in which the learners were able to pragmatically differentiate the two forms during this semester was found in the midterm oral task where the learners had to call a department store to inquire about a lost item. Below is an excerpt from Jane's performance, where the store clerk informs her that the item she lost was reported.

<Excerpt 6: [midterm oral task] inquiring about a lost item>

- |     |        |                                                                                                    |
|-----|--------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | clerk: | a midori no kaban kami bukuro arimashita kedo<br>"Uh we have the green bag, paper bag."            |
| → 2 | Jane:  | aa yokatta [plain]<br>"Oh I'm glad."                                                               |
| 3   | clerk: | hai<br>"yes."                                                                                      |
| 4   | Jane:  | ano nanji naji made <u>yatte imasu</u> [masu] ka?<br>"Uhm until what time what time are you open?" |

While Jane had been using the *masu* form with the clerk up until where this excerpt begins, she uses the plain form in an adjectival clause as seen in line 2. This switch is appropriate since she is expressing relief to herself rather than conversing with the clerk, and she switches back to the *masu* form again when resuming her conversation with the clerk in line 4. A similar switch of the forms in the same task was observed in Kate's performance as well.

In sum, while there were individual differences in how the three learners' developed their ability to use the *masu* and plain forms according to the contexts, overall developmental stages could be summarized as in Figure 2.

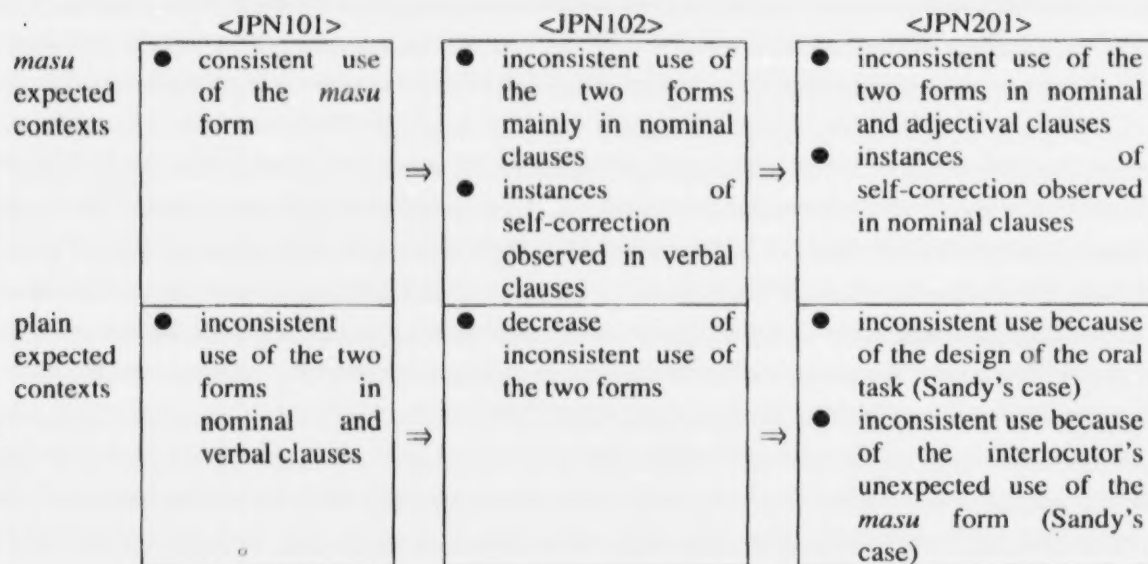


Figure 2. The developmental stages of the learners' ability to use the *masu* and plain forms according to the context

## Discussion

While the *masu* and plain forms were introduced from the first semester, analysis of the learners' journal entries and ethnographic observation tasks showed that it was not until the third semester that they started to notice the pragmatic functions of the two forms. This could be because a certain amount of time had to pass before they could notice such functions on-line. Another reason could be because emphasis on the pragmatic functions of the two forms was not placed until the second semester and various functions were introduced gradually. If this were the case, it could be said that unless the learners were provided explicit instruction of the pragmatic functions of the two forms, they could not notice such functions. In other words, this supports Schmidt's (1993) claim that L2 learners' attention must be brought to the pragmatic information for pragmatic learning to take place.

In terms of the learners' production of the two forms in *masu* expected contexts, while no appropriate use of the plain form were observed during the first semester, there were some instances of inconsistent use of the two forms in the following semesters. This could be due to the fact that the oral tasks were longer in length with more vocabulary and sentence structures involved as the courses advanced. In other words, cognitive burden on remembering vocabulary and sentence structures could have caused less attention to the form, thus resulting in the inconsistent use. However, there was also evidence of learners catching their inappropriate use and correcting themselves which could be seen as an indication of the learners developing their ability to control attention to relevant information in contexts and making appropriate selections of linguistic forms (Bialystok 1993).

As for the learners' production in the plain expected contexts, all three learners showed less inconsistent use in the second semester compared to the first. While Jane maintained a low

inconsistency rate and Kate did not engage in interaction in plain expected contexts during the third semester, Sandy's inappropriate use of the *masu* form increased. While reasons for Sandy's inappropriate use of the *masu* form in the plain expected contexts were briefly discussed above, it is interesting to examine other difficulties she was facing with the use of the plain form. In various occasions, Sandy commented on the difficulty and sense of incompleteness she has when using the plain form. In her observation assignment for the JPN102 course, she reports on a situation where she tried to use the plain form with her friends. In the report she writes, "I find it difficult to speak in the casual form. I always feel that I am leaving my sentence incomplete when I just say, for example, -wakaru. (with the rising intonation)." Additionally, in her JPN201 journal entry, she writes:

I seem to have a difficult time when needed to speak casual. ... I think it is because I was first taught the ます [masu] form. ... Maybe I am having a difficult time because there are so many ways to use "to go" casually. 行く [iku: plain present], 行った [itta: plain past], 行かない [ikanai: plain negative]... I know they are all different but just remembering them all is so confusing for me.

The comment Sandy made in the 102 observation assignment and the first part of this comment can be interpreted as her need to unlearn the form she had previously learned. Sandy has had nine years of Japanese prior to entering college and her impression is that she was only exposed to the *masu* form and feels a sense of incompleteness when leaving out the *masu* in a sentence.

The latter part of the comment above shows how Sandy feels that conjugating the plain form is harder compared to the *masu* form. As a matter of fact, as you can see in the table in Appendix A, more conjugation rules are required for the plain forms and thus could be cognitively challenging for the learners to use. Actually, while Jane, Kate and Sandy made efforts to use the plain forms in interactions with classmates, some of the other learners, as seen in the example above of Sandy's partner K, avoided using the plain form and simply stuck with the *masu* form no matter what the situation was.

Regarding the pragmatic use of the two forms, there were only a few instances in which the learners altered the two forms appropriately according to the co-occurring contextual features. One reason for the low occurrence of learners using the two forms pragmatically could be because of the difficulty to create such contexts in role-play tasks. While there were two tasks which allowed learners to differentiate the two forms pragmatically, it must be noted that similar situations were practiced in class before the tasks took place. Therefore, the extent in which the learners will be able to perform similarly in authentic situations is still questionable.<sup>7</sup>

Another reason why it may be difficult for learners to use the two forms pragmatically, such as expressing spontaneous emotions by switching to the plain form, could be related to the learners' identity and some may feel uneasy to express their inner feelings in a foreign language at early stages of learning. While this aspect will not be further explored in this paper, it is interesting to note that Jane and Kate who say that they learn Japanese because it is their culture and have plans to use Japanese (see Table 1), were the ones who expressed their emotions using *yokatta* ("I'm glad.") in the 201 midterm oral task, while Sandy, who did not mention Japan being her culture or any plans to use Japanese, did not use *yokatta*.

## Pedagogical Implications

While approaches to instructing the various functions of the *masu* and plain forms need to be further explored, some pedagogical implications could be drawn from the results of this study. First of all, finding instances in which the learners noticed and used the pragmatic functions of the two forms after instruction, that is, during the second and third semesters, and no such instances being found during the first semester, suggest that explicit instruction had benefited the learners in noticing those functions as well as using them in interaction. The effectiveness of explicit instruction of pragmatic aspects of language is consistent with Kasper's (1997) report on various studies which have examined the explicit and implicit approaches to instructing pragmatics.

Secondly, providing opportunities to actually use the two forms in various contexts allowed the learners in this study to attend to the co-occurring contextual features and gradually control their use of the appropriate linguistic form. Although role-play tasks are limited in creating contexts which are authentic, they still allow learners to experiment using the two forms. In order to further develop the learners' competence in using the two forms in actual situations, it could be suggested that authentic interactions which would allow learners to engage in various contexts be created. For instance, native speakers of Japanese, if available, could be invited to the classroom and have the students engage in extended interaction perhaps over a certain period of time.

Finally, while many textbooks seem to focus on the learners learning the *masu* form, early introduction of the plain form allowed the learners to engage in a broader range of relationships using Japanese and eventually enabled them, although still limited in context, to mix the two forms pragmatically. Not only do many textbooks not introduce the pragmatic functions of the *masu* and plain forms, they also seem to place more emphasis on having the learners talk politely using the *masu* form. While it could be true that a learner of Japanese is likely to encounter more situations in which the *masu* form is expected, it seems as though the learners are expected to speak only in that form. In other words, it could be said that learners of Japanese are considered out-group or *soto* members of the Japanese community, thus not providing them with an opportunity to use the plain form to develop in-group or *uchi* relationships in Japanese. Furthermore, the possibility of having them use the forms pragmatically seems not to be considered. In order to instruct what the learners need to know and use, and not what a Japanese speaker thinks a learner should learn, I suggest needs analysis to be conducted and reveal the kinds of contexts in which the learners are likely to engage in. As an example of how Kate expresses her needs, she writes in her 101 journal;

So when learning the many different styles of speaking Japanese, casual, formal, ... I feel as though I am really learning the Japanese language and culture, and not just textbook stuff. One of the reasons I chose Japanese is so that I may converse with my friends and other Japanese/Okinawans at cultural activities and events. I would find learning the "safe" formal style as sufficient but at the same time insufficient. Sufficient because I could use the formal style to anyone and insufficient because I could distance my friends because of that style of speaking ... I feel more confident in being able to understand the Japanese language in a natural setting.

## Appendix A

### Clause Types in the *Masu* and Plain Forms

|                   | Plain form                   | Masu form                      |
|-------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Verbal clause     | - (r)u (present affirmative) | - masu (present affirmative)   |
|                   | - nai (present negative)     | - masen (present negative)     |
|                   | - ta (past affirmative)      | - mashita (past affirmative)   |
|                   | - nakatta (past negative)    | - masendeshita (past negative) |
|                   | V [pre-nominal form]+no      | V [pre-nominal form]+ndesu     |
| Nominal clause    | N/AdjN+da or N/AdjN          | N/AdjN+desu                    |
|                   | N/AdjN+janai                 | N/AdjN+janaidesu               |
|                   | N/AdjN+datta                 | N/AdjN+deshita                 |
|                   | N/AdjN+janakatta             | N/AdjN+janakattadesu           |
|                   | N/AdjN[pre-nominal form]+no  | N/AdjN[pre-nominal form]+ndesu |
| Adjectival clause | - i                          | - i+desu                       |
|                   | - kunai                      | - kunai+desu                   |
|                   | - katta                      | - katta+desu                   |
|                   | - kunakatta                  | - kunakatta+desu               |
|                   | A[pre-nominal form]+no       | A[pre-nominal form]+ndesu      |

## Notes

1 The Situational Functional Japanese is the textbook used by the program in which the students in this paper are studying Japanese. This textbook does actually mention in the Introduction section that speech levels in Japanese are not predetermined but change in accordance with various combinations of factors such as the formality of the situation in which the conversation takes place, the topic and even the speaker's emotional state. However, while some of the model conversations in this textbook, although not authentic, do include alternate use of the *masu* and plain forms by a single speaker, the reasons for such use are not explicitly explained and many phrases are provided only with a mark that indicates whether it is used in casual or formal speech.

2 In this paper, I follow Cook in adopting Ochs & Schieffelin's (1979) definition of "context" which states as "the social and psychological world in which the language user operates at any given time."

3 All proper nouns for the learners used in this paper are pseudonyms.

4 Since the *masu* and plain forms were instructed as markers of formality/informality at the 101 level, the learners' use of "formal style" and "casual style" usually entails the *masu* form and the plain forms.

5 I say "officially" here, since the use of the plain form does appear in a model conversation in lesson 2 but is not a focus at that point, and is introduced as a grammar point in lesson 5.

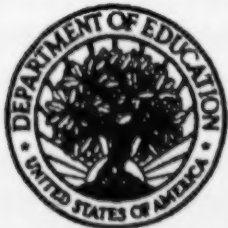
6 Actually, one of the tasks was a situation with a close friend but Kate misread the instructions and assumed that she was performing the task with a stranger. Another task was with a classmate, but since the classmate was much older she chose to use the *masu* form which is appropriate to the context. Therefore, Kate's utterances for this semester were all counted in the *masu* expected contexts except for one instance in which she appropriately used the plain form when expressing relief to herself.

7 Actually, Kate appropriately used the phrase *yokatta* [plain] ("I'm glad") when I told her after class in Japanese that her pen-pal told me that she received Kate's letter.

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